‘The better it looked, the worse it felt’: Sports work, mental illness and the problem of authenticity

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'To thine own self be true': Sports work, mental illness and the problem of authenticity

> I felt myself fighting for breath and for a single moment's peace. 'God. Make it stop. Please'
> Should I call someone? You're joking. What, let someone see me like this? I can't let anyone see me like this, going half out of my mind. What would I tell them? What could I say to them? What could I say to them to make them understand what was happening to me when I didn't know what the hell was going on myself?
> The fear filled up every part of me.
>
> (Trescothick, 2009, p.201)

Introduction

In February 2006, England international cricketer, Marcus Trescothick, returned unexpectedly from England's winter tour of India. Extraordinary media speculation about his early return ensued, yet the on-looking cricket world knew nothing of his physical and psychological suffering. Diagnosed with depression, and prescribed anti-depressant medication, Trescothick subsequently set about regaining his health, restoring his reputation and, once again, his place as opening batsman for the England international cricket team. Even so, while speculation about his return diminished, questions about this unprecedented incident never disappeared. In November 2006, Trescothick, now feeling more secure, flew to Australia as a member of the 2006 Ashes Tour yet, just a few days prior to the opening Ashes Test, he once again walked out on his teammates and returned to his family in England. In their press release on the matter, the English Cricket Board cited a recurrence of a 'stress-related illness'. Trescothick found himself the target of the English press once more. Writing in the Daily Mail (November 20, 2006), journalist Jeff Powell made the following remarks:

> The Ashes are about to be reignited Down Under and England's opening batsman is back in Blighty but, as yet, Marcus Trescothick's doctors have not made public an exact diagnosis of his condition … Now this will come as a seismic shock to the millions who would willingly trade five years of life expectancy for the honour of playing for their country … don't we realise that these icons are just simple folk like ourselves who deserve our sympathy, not our scorn, when they crack under the pressure? No we do not. Not when they eagerly reap the rewards of representing the country.

In 2008, Trescothick declared publicly the fact that he was suffering from mental illness in his acclaimed autobiography, 'Coming Back to Me'[i], a book which describes in exhaustive detail, firstly the commingling of the pressures of his private life and his 'work

place' – professional cricket – and, secondly, his experience of the physical and mental pains and silent distress that characterise depression. Sufferers related intimately with the emotion-laden descriptions he offered of his private, torturous episodes. His account detailed also his shame and embarrassment; to use his words, 'what the hell did I have to be depressed about?' (Trescothick, 2008, p. 247). Issues of presentation of self are key for all sufferers of stigmatised illnesses like depression (Goffman, 1961), but Trescothick's account describes relations that reach beyond everyday encounters that most endure to the watching cricket audiences who sit in stadia and pour over media outlets.

Trescothick's case is valuable for this introductory essay on sports work and mental illness since, unlike most other studies (and autobiographies) of the downfall of professional athletes which largely offer tales of loss and 'adjustment' trauma *post* career (Frith, 2001), Trescothick describes compellingly the ongoing, *mid career* effects of a life as a sports worker and goes some way to problematise the illusion that professional sport is a labour of love. His narrative highlights the relentless self-identity constraints and performance scrutiny that characterise sports work, integral to which are his experiences of 'achieved' celebrity; in other words, what it means to be well-known and recognisable for your work. He draws attention also to the human cost of his work, including the inexorable entangling of his private and public lives, circumstances which raise the issue for him of job-related burnout (Hochschild, 1983).

Trescothick's account illustrates aptly the ideological-based conjecture of fans and journalists who formulate explanations for the motives and behaviour of professional athletes; fans are shocked when athletes-cum-celebrities admit to mental health 'issues' and journalists – like Powell quoted above – struggle to rationalise the *depressive* and *suicidal* actions of professionals whose lives are assumed to offer possibilities for self-realisation (Powell, 2006). Thus, sport provides a fascinating lens on such labelled, stigmatized groups in social life precisely because of the assumptions that are made about contemporary sporting figures. Since the publication of 'Coming Back to Me' in 2008, the title of which focuses fittingly on Trescothick's private identity-crisis, there have been several other sports workers who have talked publicly about issues connected with their physical and mental states of health. Accounts of this kind are no longer the preserve of retired athletes who struggle with the loss of a former, often celebrated self-identity. Emerging from their silence, a number are now reporting illnesses such as forms of addiction, depression, and practices of self-harm as on-going issues throughout periods of their sporting careers. For example, there have been several professional athletes who have been interviewed for television documentaries about

experiences of depression (Flintoff, 2012), or disclosed details to national newspapers (Cochrane, 2012). Athletes' (including players') unions such as the Professional Footballers' Association, have issued official advice to members on how to deal with personal 'welfare' concerns[ii], and there has been some exposure to newly established welfare 'retreats' for sports men and women specifically who experience various problems connected to addiction among other mental health conditions. While there is now some formal recognition of these welfare issues, to date very few academics have attempted to explain the prevalence of mental health illnesses among high-level athletes[iii]. An issue for all social scientists attempting to comprehend this social problem is the complex confusion of mental health issues, the pressures of the excesses of professional sport, and dangerous sporting practices; a multifaceted set of social processes that require much further academic attention.

In the light of the notes offered in relation to this opening case, the objects of this chapter are twofold: (i) to explore the connections between the conditions of work for professional athletes and mental illness; and (ii) to propose an initial explanation for the 'apparent' prevalence of mental illness problems among professional athletes in contemporary sport.

Conditions of work in sport

In discussing in interview with an ageing Premier League football player his successes as an international and multiple cup winner, the high tech and (observably) impressive facilities at his club, and the material rewards and celebrity status he has acquired, he said, reflecting on his career, 'the better it looked, the worse it felt.' While statements that capture the spirit or essential beauty of sport – for example, the *flow* of executing skill to an audience – dominate media and fan-based accounts of sport (Hornby, 1992), on-going academic research on high-level athletes nevertheless has consistently revealed that the structures of professional sport are such as to (all-but) inevitably rebound on individual athletes in the form of social, emotional, and psychological problems (Hoberman, 1992; Nesti, 2010). Empirical studies of sports work refer often to cynically-minded professional athletes – mostly team players – who slowly come to recognise and accommodate over time the notion that they are 'pieces of meat', 'commodities', 'just another number', and 'not worth anything to anyone' (Robidoux, 2001; Roderick, 2006; Wacquant, 2001). Yet such unambiguous narratives of alienation are rarely articulated beyond a narrow group of academics and their research, and are nearly absent from serious media-led debate. Mental health illnesses – like depression – have been least often utilised to describe the nature of the

dark side of sports work, specifically because the prevailing logic of this work purports that fulfilment and authentic self-realisation are attainable and the logical outcome of success.

Writing in The Lancet (2005, p.36), Kerry Mummery makes the following point: "... athletes may be more predisposed than the general population to depression, because of the physical and psychological demands placed on them by the *sporting environment*. Stress, for example, is associated with depression and is inherent in the life of the athlete" [emphasis added]. Mummery's thoughtful essay does not offer empirical evidence to support this argument, but he conveys the well-appreciated idea that people tend not to dispute the nature of the connections between the work 'environment' characteristic of professional sport, the stress associated with performance, and the impact this may have on individual athletes. Few academics have taken seriously the dramatic consequences of these 'biopsychosocial' relations (Douglas, 2009; Nesti, 2010). Even so, in discussing issues bound up with the conditions of his work, an experienced footballer made the following point:

> It's just the pressure cooker environment ... it's difficult physically, and mentally, and emotionally ... it's tough and you can see why unsupported issues may develop into some kinds of clinical issues, you know? Different personalities are predisposed to these I'd imagine ... but it's just the rollercoaster of football. You win and everything is fantastic; a great team, great players. You lose and the whole world caves in and that goes on every three days, fifty times a year, for ten years and it literally is a rollercoaster and some that don't have the skills to separate out, you know, who get caught up in the rollercoaster, you know that constant up and down ... it's not healthy I think.

The upshot and (moral) outcomes of 'careers' in professional sport for athletes who repeatedly come through the ebb and flow of identity-arresting employment contingencies *can include* a questionable sense of dignity at work; a diminished sense of respect for colleagues; the development of wholly individualistic frames of reference; the devaluing of work responsibilities; and cynical and uncommitted relationships with managerial and leadership figures (Roderick, 2006; Wacquant, 1995).

In addition to (auto)biographies (Kirwin, 2010; McKensie, 2012; Reng, 2011; Thorpe, 2005), research on athletes' careers illuminates their attempts to maintain some sense of existential poise (agency) when it comes to managing their on-going careers in professional sport (Douglas, 2009). The constant battle with identity issues, dignity at work issues, and their struggles to retain – perhaps reclaim – some comprehension of authenticity in terms of their self-identities at work (and how these are blurred by the public nature of their jobs),

weathers athletes' psychological and physical resilience. Professional sport is assumed to be a labour of love undertaken by high wage earners (now often celebrities) who single-mindedly commit body and soul to achieve valorised goals. It is a career associated with privilege, recognition and glamour, but the public nature of this body-centred 'performance' trade bleeds into their lives and professional athletes frequently report on their loss of control of their everyday realities (Thorpe, 2012). In this respect, former tennis champion, Andre Agassi (2009, p.168) makes the following point: "Fame is a force. It's unstoppable. You shut your windows to fame and it slides under the door." Following various transitional experiences, rather than their selves being unalterably shaped by coach and managerial rhetoric, the consequent development of distrust helps athletes to keep workplace norms at a distance such that they are no longer internalized (Roderick, 2013). One outcome of the impact of these social processes is that, in time, athletes dis-identify with values tied to team and work culture, and exhibit high levels of cynicism to managerial powers in order to repossess a sense of self-truth and overcome tensions between who they feel *they really are* and who *they need to be 'at work'* (Roderick, 2013). Even so, athletes struggle to develop any sense of who they are (and what they have become) because all their work stems from others' (legitimate) claims to control, survey, observe and correct their working bodies (Shogun, 1999). These structural conditions paradoxically collude to constrain their ability to remain true (authentic) to themselves – that is, to locate their inner voice. A current professional footballer articulated the following point in interview:

> It's the survival of the fittest. The ones who flourish are the ones who survive. My argument would be, imagine what those players could be with added support, you know, how good they could be not just performance wise, but in becoming authentic with themselves and the positives that that has.

Yet the conditions, and natural logic, of sports work imply a lack of control over athletes' immediate circumstances such that they focus on what they are, rather than who they might become.

The constant stress of the demands of sports work to which Mummery (2005) makes reference – including specifically to be successful and to behave in accordance with normative sub-cultural values – can exhaust the psyche of the athlete, a context that leads them concurrently to lose a sense of adequate future perspective and produce the conditions for the internalisation of depression. In summarising current sociological understandings of

professional athletes, we can say that many are celebrated, sensationalised, mortified, dehumanised, and commodified. They are subject to constant observation, scrutiny and correction in relation to their working bodies, their talent and performances (Manley, 2012). They are susceptible to changing technological and medical (scientific) innovation and development (Miah, 2013). All these processes are rationalised and justified as fundamental features of the logic of work, a logic which espouses the twin ideas that athletes must always strive to win and be successful, and that they must love their work and treat it as a privilege; they must realise, and not squander, their 'God given' talents. The effects of the power of this discourse – one that has no meaningful rival – are to camouflage often chronic underlying (mental) health issues and stifle athletes' genuine motives for seeking help.

Depression among athletes

Since the 1980s, there has been a substantial rise in incidence of mental illness (Rodgers & Pilgrim, 2010). Controversies abound concerning the burgeoning mental and emotional disorders of late modernity (Horzitz & Wakefield, 2007); newly classified illnesses feature a broad range of reactions to stress, loss and grief (Kokanovic et al., 2013). Indicators of this apparent rise in depression's status as a major social trend include: the widespread perception that depression is increasing rapidly in the community; the escalation in the number of people being treated for depression; the rise in prescriptions for anti-depressants; and the explosion of academic and media attention on psychiatric problems (Rodgers and Pilgrim, 2010). Diagnostic guidelines are mostly based on a medical model of care and often present anti-depressants as the treatment of choice (McPherson & Armstrong, 2006). Yet for all this, physicians' accounts of diagnosing depression – and all the conditions often subsumed under this expanding label – indicate that they experience a tension between the biomedical discourse of depression that warrants a clinical label, and in which they are trained, and the recognition that the social contexts of patients' lives contribute essentially to their experience of emotional distress (Thomas-MacLean & Stoppard, 2004). Kokanovic et al. (2013) indicate that some physicians feel powerless when dealing with patients they have diagnosed as depressed because they see the origin of patients' suffering as social and therefore beyond the medical domain.

Studies of lay accounts of mental health suggest that individuals typically navigate between the social and biomedical explanatory frameworks in making sense of their experiences of emotional anguish (Kokanovic et al., 2013). Likewise, professional athletes seem most regularly to locate their experiences of mental illness within the broader context of

their social and personal lives, attributing distress primarily to adverse life events rather than medical causes. For example, in articulating his personal story to a counsellor, Marcus Trescothick (2009, p. 249) notes: "I tried to explain as best I could about the ghastly day-merging-into-day grind of international cricket and how the enjoyment and even the joy I had always felt about playing the game ... had all but disappeared and how I felt I might never get it back." Other professional athletes who have similarly experienced mental illness have discussed the conditions that underscore an apparent disregard for their emotions and their management, and which appear simultaneously to (re)shape athletes' sentiments towards their work. Former English professional footballer, Leon McKenzie (2012, p.27), made the following point: "I know the world of professional football is a cut-throat business and players are often treated like commodities to be bought and sold on a whim, but at the end of the day we are human beings with feelings. We cry, we get upset, we get scared." The social origins of psychiatric illness thus weigh heavy in athletes-as-sufferers' narratives of their experiences of depression. Although there has not been an obvious shift towards categorical symptom-based biological diagnosis in those medical encounters described, in consultation with medical professionals, several athletes have indicated that they have initially been prescribed anti-depressants[iv]. This method of diagnosis typically makes invisible the social forces at work among this occupational community of professional athletes and falls back on treatment and prevention strategies that target the individual; thus highlighting the limitations of employing a medical paradigm to solve what are perceived as entrenched social and personal issues. So while the biological model prevails – a situation which has led to an emphasis on clinical diagnosis and prescription drug treatment – the case of professional athletes illuminates the complexity of all manner of biopsychosocial effects of a life pursuing sport-as-work.

In serious discussions of the links between athletes and mental illness, journalists and academics have referred almost exclusively to the stress of athletic performances and the conditions of work to comprehend what is going on in their sporting lives (Hodgson, 2006; Murphy, 2011; Roxby. 2011). In many respects – for example, in the case of media reactions to Trescothick – an overly simplistic cause and effect has been established which overstates athletes' sporting environments and under-theorises the structures of self-identity and how these are impacted by living a (public) life valorised by fans of sport. Yet even though this form of employment – like those in the creative or entertainment industries – might well fall under that category of work that people *just cannot help doing*, there are some distinctive post-modern occupational stressors to which athletes now make regular mention; in this

respect we are thinking of the escalating effects of social media developments. Although the pressured nature of performances has been prioritised in sport science and medicalized accounts, including to some degree the (career) uncertainty of injury and athletes' fear of failure and loss (Mummery, 2005), less explanatory effort has been focused on comprehending the consequences of the commodification of human feelings (Hochschild, 1983) in the context of professional sport and the effects this has on social spaces in their private and public lives; what might be termed the ongoing effects of 'well known-ness' (Boorstin, 1992). A former international cricketer described a typical incident that he had to deal with as a *recognisable* sporting figure:

> The weirdest thing is when you go somewhere ... I came back off an [international] tour, and I was having dinner with my first wife at a restaurant ... and some bloke just pulled up a chair and sat at the table. He said I just wanna talk to you about the tour. I said, I don't know who you are ... I'm having a private meal with my wife ... you wouldn't expect a stranger to come and sit at your table when you're having dinner with your missus ... I just said I don't give a f***, get lost ... I hadn't gone there as a cricketer, and I wasn't f****** there for his pleasure, I was there for my own.

Many athletes gain public profiles and sometimes achieve a level of celebrity status. Accordingly, the balance between the public and private spaces of their lives changes and, as indicated, dramatically for some. All athletes who aspire to make sport their work come sooner or later to appreciate the ineluctable prominence of this 'unusual' work. A former, English county cricketer remarked poignantly,

> In sports we are pushing all the time to be quicker, stronger, technically better ... your employers are expecting improvement every single year. I don't think in a normal job ... the employer is putting you under that stress on a day-to-day basis and if he was I think you might get a few people crumbling. I think within a sporting environment it's more accepted that this is what you are doing ... you're up on a pedestal to be knocked off every single day you're performing because you are visible because you are in the public eye ... in the normal working environment that isn't the case.

In describing the major categories of job demands typical of sport – the deprivations, rewards, and environment – little mention is ever made of the emotional facets of surrounding work contexts. Psychology studies of sport are focused more often on performance stress(ors) (Mellalieu et al., 2009), and to date there has been an overabundance of (theoretical) speculation accompanied by a severe lack of (empirical) verification. In other words, individuals writing about the careers of athletes have not prioritised the personal, felt-

identity struggles between the kind of athlete-as-worker the employer expects them to be, which might require them to *fake* a preferred workplace self, and the requirement to produce a certain emotional climate that can stir-up emotional dissonance and impair a sense of authenticity.

Sport work, mental illness, and authenticity

Performances in professional sport are, like entertainment work, intangible, consisting of (emotive) experiences that are produced and consumed simultaneously. There are intensely social aspects of athletes' roles as a direct outcome of the public nature of their employment, which of course attracts media attention. Hence, sports work involves often regular and concentrated episodes of emotional labour (Hochschild 1983; Lee Sinden, 2012). Although there is a suggestion that sports work performed by professional athletes may make them especially vulnerable to forms of anxiety and mental distress (Nesti, 2010), this final section examines the extent to which the experience of a lack of authenticity related to their work, as an effect of this emotional labour, serves as a mediator between such employment and (sometimes severe) psychological disquiet. Although classic sociological research has identified a range of workers' *psychological* responses to interactive service jobs – which have similarities with sports work – and the emotional labour they entail, for example occupational burnout (Hochschild, 1983), little is known about the relationship between specific facets of performance work in elite sport and the mechanisms through which such conditions may influence mental health.

Hochschild (1983) found that performing emotional labour requires some workers to suppress unfitting emotions and, in others, to heighten or essentially transform the emotions they are experiencing. The concept of emotional labour attracts interest to the efforts involved in controlling and regulating feeling, and its display, in ways that are consistent with occupational (sub-cultural) guidelines. Athletes who have admitted to suffering from depression, both in academic interview and in the media, have implied that they have not always been forthcoming about their illness during their careers – in part because of their fear of repercussions – and, therefore, have needed to 'work at' their presentation of self; admitting to fear openly runs counter to the display of 'heart' expected of *true* athletes. An experienced professional footballer, for example, said in interview: "I just put up a shield, a persona that people would say, I was of some sort of confidence ya know, all of a sudden a mask, another persona ... not letting people see the other side." Similarly a former international cricketer recalled: "It's almost like my life was made up of acting and when I

got home and I shut the doors. Then I was myself." He went on to explain that in time he reached a point where he "couldn't act anymore." In his autobiography, former International cricketer, Graham Thorpe (2005, p.10), drew attention implicitly to the stress of emotional labour as follows:

> You can't just walk off the field when you're playing for your club or country, let alone England, but that's what I wanted to do. Hide ... Sometimes you just have to put on a face, even though you're feeling awful and your self-esteem in on the floor.

Finally, interviewed for the Daily Telegraph, former English professional footballer, Darren Eadie, said: "I'd go out, be a footballer, put on this facade, be bubbly, and then get home and completely collapse ... There are players going into training now, laughing and joking, getting home and thinking 'thank God that's all over'" (Winter, 2012).

Athletes develop and mature (often at relatively young ages) into a supposedly 'meritocratic' world dominated by very specific ideological values, a schemata which prioritises winning, achievement, dedication, hard work, commitment, and delayed gratification (Warriner, 2012). The danger is though, that the dynamics of relationships and meanings among members of sports 'teams' trap athletes continuously in a position where they feel the need to be at opposite poles of this value schemata at the same time: for example, as a squad member in a football team a player may need to demonstrate submission to the wider goals and good of the team (over other individual desires), but feel demeaned by the role they are asked to play (i.e., substitute) in the production of the performance. Many professional athletes are thus repeatedly and unendingly developing strategies – rationalising ways – to enable them to reconcile such competing values; a situation that may demand the performance of determined and spirited emotion work. Australian Olympic swimmer, Ian Thorpe (2012, p.7), noted in this regard: "I felt like my career had been taken over by others ... I felt like a performing seal in a zoo." The trigger for mental illness may come when, time after time, what is absolutely unacceptable to an athlete's sense of dignity at work is simultaneously understood as unavoidably necessary for career survival.

Thus, mental illness cannot be explained by recourse to a simple cause and effect calculation; that is, understood solely in terms of the unintended consequence of performance stress. Over the years and always in relation with others, a professional athlete's social self can be shaped and structured in such as way that it eventually comes to be ensnared in an insoluble, anguished dilemma. British Olympic Champion, Kelly Holmes, offered telling details of self-harm practices she subjected herself to and, in attempting to rationalise her

behaviour, she noted: “you are looking in the mirror and you don’t really see yourself” (Sports Life Stories, ITV4, 24/4/2013). English International cricketer, Andrew Flintoff (2012), drew attention to the complex problem of in-authenticity and the depression he experienced in the following way: “I was always seen as this character who was unflappable, however, you do go back to your room every night and whatever people think about who you are, I think at times it can be very different.” He went on to say, “I don’t want to have to pretend to be something I’m not. Nor do I want to play up to what everyone wants from me. I think now it’s just time for me to be myself.” Flintoff argues therefore that the questions professional athletes should ask themselves are: ‘Who am I and what am I?’ The upshot for athletes is that, for many, and in particular those suffering mental illness, the authentic emotions they once harboured towards their work become ever more distant – at times, lost or forgotten – and they struggle to recognise the person they have turned out to be. They no longer connect with an inner self – externalising their motives for continual action – and lose all sense of meaning in terms of the work role they feel constrained to perform, yet for which, paradoxically, they can oftentimes receive public acclaim. Sports workers who no longer recognise what constitutes for them an authentic sense of self are susceptible to mental health illnesses such as depression.

Contemporary professional sport has undergone a period of technological and cultural transformation in which, at an individual level, athletes have come increasingly to be ‘other-directed’ (Riesman, 2001) in an industry where mass and social media are now forceful manipulators of reality. In this ‘hyper real’ world, high profile athletes must learn how to present and manage their social selves efficiently (Cowen, 2002). It is in such social conditions that they have offered detailed reflections on the existence of a ‘real me’ that survives separately from the social persona they feel is required at work; a context that in time may lead to self-estrangement. In other words, many athletes, in particular those in the early ‘hedonistic’ stages of their careers, can be taken in by their own ‘performances’ at work. As Goffman (1959, p. 80-81) noted,

> the performer comes to be his [sic] own audience; he comes to be performer and observer of the same show ... In everyday terms, there will be things he knows, or has known, that he will not be able to tell himself. This intricate manoeuvre of self-delusion constantly occurs.

This occupational psychosis may endure and athletes may be unaware of how ‘authentic’ they are feeling at any given moment; yet an athlete’s customary workplace personality may

be called into question when career contingencies like demotion, injury, failure, and coach succession arise. At that stage some athletes strain to rediscover a sense of the authentic and to re-engage with their 'real' social self – 'coming back to me' was how Trescothick captured this sentiment – yet some are so fragmented by their daily lives that they struggle to recapture the morally-grounded centre of identity that represents their unfeigned selves (Erickson, 1997). An issue for academics interested in the ties between mental illness and professional sports work is that in attempting to theorise about 'what is going on' in the darker spaces of their lives, any humanistic methodological approach must allow for inconsistency within the self "without an accompanying abandonment of the potential for authenticity" (Erickson, 1995, p. 122). Thus, it should be anticipated that athletes may feel exploited and demoralised by employers, yet still recognise the value of their singular contribution to the production process; a *value* which finds meaningful expression only in relation to athletes' self-referential understanding of their selves.

Concluding points

> We look at professional sportspeople ... [and] make the assumption that because you're successful and earning lots of money, because you are acclaimed by society, you are going to be living in an emotional nirvana. You're going to be happy, you're going to be philosophically certain and everything is going well for you. That is a myth.
>
> (Syed, 2012)

Sport offers overwhelming evidence that when athletes breakdown it is as a result of a complex mix of social and psychological circumstances – consistent feelings of failure, loss, shame, humiliation, exclusion, and discrimination are all played out around issues of career freedom, dependence and uncertainty. Whilst eschewing dominant psychological comprehensions of athletic identity – which overstate the single-mindedness of an athlete's outlook and impoverishes their sense of agency – we want readers ultimately to appreciate how immensely complicated the structuring of each athletes' social self is; how many factors are involved (in their and significant others' daily lives in sport); and how many opportunities, pitfalls, and traps await their corporeal efforts. These are hazardous situations they all want to avoid, but cannot. The conditions of sports work add to this multifaceted psycho-social environment and can be summarised by reference to the dehumanised search for success (Hoberman, 1992), the constant, unavoidable surveillance of performance and workplace behaviour (Shogun, 1999), and their 'docility' (Manley, 2012). The all-encompassing nature of sports work on athletes' sense of self breeds a lack of autonomy and

freedom of expression. A key sociological problem however for all who have an interest in this ‘unusual work’ is overcoming the value-laden idea that it is hard to understand such well-being issues for athletes 'gifted' with talent, who stereotypically live celebrated and privileged careers. As journalist, Piers Morgan (2012), said to Andrew Flintoff, “... I don’t honestly think most sports journalists ... really cared that much about the sensitivities of highly paid athletes ... to actually claim to be depressed as you’re having to stay in a five-star hotel while you’re playing cricket for England to me seemed ridiculous”. Attempts to control the emotions of workers reach into the very core of an individual’s sense of self (Petersen, 2011). Due to the contradictions embedded in the constraint that athletes-as-workers produce ‘authentic’ performances, the loss of control over their work may be particularly harmful to individual well-being. Employer regulation may indeed create problems of identity and authenticity for athletes and for their audiences. As Hochschild (1983) described it, the more features of one’s self-identity that an organisation puts up for sale, the harder it becomes to recognise which aspects of self are truly one’s own. Like identities, one’s sense of authenticity is grounded in self meanings that saturate the key assumptions that athletes make about who they are (Erickson, 1995). Athletes’ feelings for their work and their emotional reactions are governed by, sometimes silenced, and rarely expressed to critical audiences; ‘true’ feelings towards the production of their performances are kept in check and, accordingly, athletes can feel emotionally isolated. It is understood that there are permitted and forbidden stories about their work that they are compelled either to share or silence; opportunities to be free to voice aspects of personhood are severely limited. A sense of authentic self-realisation at work is therefore hard to achieve for professional athletes in part as an outcome of the ever-increasing social spaces where they are ‘on guard’, a situation which raises the question of where in their lives they can shed the fear of exposure and publicity and be ‘themselves’.

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[i] Trescothick's autobiography won wide acclaim and was awarded the William Hill Sports Book of the Year prize in 2008.

[ii] In 2011, the Professional Footballers' Association issued the 'Footballers' Guidebook' to all current and former professional players. It looks at all kinds of stress-inducing circumstances faced by players.

[iii] Representations of professional athletes on the matter of mental illness have been obtained from a range of media sites, from journalism, popular writing, and academic texts since 2006. These do not constitute a systematic documentary or content analysis; even so, many articles and biographies have been considered. These representations are not intended to stand as a representative sample, nor would we claim that this is the *only* way in which athletes are represented. Even so, the data gathered here help shed light on how athletes experience mental health issues and how well existing explanatory concepts of stress and the working

environment explain the experiences and outcomes for this subset of sports workers. As part of a wider project on professional sport and mental health, which is in its early stages, seven semi-structured, qualitative interviews have been conducted. Data segments from these interviews that are illustrative of key ideas have been included in this essay where relevant to do so.

[iv] Systematic evidence to corroborate this statement has not been obtained, but several elite athletes have discussed in print their use of anti-depressants. See for example The Secret Footballer (2012).